

A Life in 70 Poems

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1956-1965

The style is becoming more experimental in form. But the pattern of alternating short structured pieces with longer more rhapsodic poems continues. Scanners and text recognition have made sense of a variety of sources.

1956

WAITING THAT WE LOVE THE BEST

The whisperings.
Claw-hands in corners,
Faded nylon webs across the ceiling,
Lurch of bears at feeding time,
White blots the birds make
In the misery and loneliness of shit-
All these are it.
And, you know. I bear no mystic maladies,
That infecting your blood might cause these visions.
The glossy stratagems we tried are peeled quite clean
And your eyes shiver in the whitening wind
To see the painted tracks we still must climb.
I take your arm. That pliant flesh
Instantly bruises, lime-green, sage-blue.
But this you suffer with the rest.
It is not the doing, no, no, no.
It is the waiting that we love the best.

1957

NORTH WIND

A mask of snow hides no particular face.
The emotional landscape's fixed grimace
Is softened by this cold.
Features so benignly calm
And chill within a perfect mould
Could never harm
Man with their brief and fragile form.

Now turn your dazzled eyes away.
It will not bear their weight.
Be careful, or you too will sink
As birds do when that mask is deathly white.

1958

Here where the air is pure we will stop and drop a flower into the
crinkled water. Here where the hawk hovers we shall talk in whispers.
This quiet is too loud to bear. Like the hawk in the air it soars on its own heartbeat
and it flows through the wing tracery like a pulse of blood through a gothic apse.
Oh do not, no do not, howl out your defeat in this clear air there
is no pause for regret. There is no pause for defeat. The hawk
circles, looking for its prey. How can a shape so high swoop? A
black blot, a clot of heart muscle shooting fear, how can it do it?
How can we lie here in the leaning grass listening to this time
beat. How can we lie here under the shadow of the circling hawk,
sweeping its wings over our eyelids in the fierce heat of this
alpine landscape. Crag and crinkling water and the flowers we do
not recognise from our sea-level upbringing. Why are we whispering?
Isn't there all the remoteness of the highlands in the air and the
purple aircapes full of flowing shadows that round and swell and
bloom and shiver and crease and flicker. Although our eyes are shut
we still see the bright hawk stamped out of the sky and the grey
scree that drain the air with their greyness. There is no other.
There is nothing except the here and now and the full bowl of the
valley that brims with water and flows onto our anxious lips and
colours the alternative of the window or the daguerreotype, mirror
glitter in reverse.

1959

After seeing the film of the Newport Jazz Festival

Faces in parenthesis,
Devoid of emphasis,
Half-hidden, smiling,
The sunlight suddenly failing.
Unsexed by shimmering vibraphone.
Lovers, make moan.

Up and down, the trumpeter
Outrides the charioteer.

The idle swinging of the balances
(Ice-green, fox-gold). destroys.
Shutters of the earliest morning
Protect these fragile toys!

Rhine maiden bearing Rheingold.

Wagner-conditioned, on the rocks.

Time cheeks punched in pliant flesh.
Deep armpits twelve-hour flower-fresh.
Tastes of sour morning from a stomach fold.
An old man's dusty locks.

Then come, from rose marquee,
Bright clarinet
And striped trombone.
Blatant trumpets moan.
Blow cut-outs over the grass.

Scraps of paper,
Whirling they pass.

1960

ROMANTIC

This eternal despair is
The solitary agony,
The fatal path.

Browning,
Raking the ash,
Found it cold:
Sensed the flame die.

Bald fat Byron died
Of irony, in Greece.

Chatterton took poison.

Paludrin,
Not death, brings modern ease.
The path's fatality is ease,
Easy the agony.
Eternity of our despair
Is comprehended in a minute.

1961

I saw this old woman.
Hardly able to stand
On swollen bandaged legs,
She clung, panting and coughing,
To the corner of a wall by Woolworth's.
She would not give up.
She must walk and see
The glittering fancies of Woolworth's.

My hair bristled at this scarecrow,
More hateful than death-
Than death is to decrepitude.

When we grow old
Cells fail to regenerate.
Lines that were smiles
Remain when laughter's gone.

With his disastrous knife
Time carves our weary flesh.
Terrible, ineffectual rage
Shakes hand and head.

From a dusty bag
Memories totter,
Tales for the darkest corner.
Who now has time for our rheumy weeping?
Who shares the impossible past?

Hand on hip, Time implacably waits,
To trip us unseeing
And break us, she waits.

1962

who is this (e! e!) cummings?

It is Irma he murmurs

Stooping to avoid the fluttery ingress of several

black women from Tahiti.

SHE is startled by the wall and her hard black shadow
like a pomegranate ties
up
the rosyfingered in a gesture.

Are you the Mallocks? That is the quincunx here, layered into this wall,
Every gesture stirring is obliterated
By more gestures gradually moving towards
a final gesture bound in the whirling ropes
round in the whining hopes
down in the final gropes
Seventy years from here as the crowsfoot.

There was a point in time on which angels could

Have danced but did not; and there (he said)
eviscerating a cucumber sandwich
Lies all the sorrow of a purple passage.

"How *is* your purple passage?"

He then dashed at me with a brush and covered me from head to foot with scarlet
madder. The *pink* period began shortly after.

Time does not lie heavily in London.
Time does not lie at all.
Time has shrunk into itself and hangs
Here on a London wall.
A gallery of faces, a handful of aces,
Two tentative paces, 18th century graces,
Fugitive visions that leave no traces.

It is
I r m a

A sa tour abolie.

Tom Phillips meets e.e. cummings in mysterious circumstances.

1964

I tell you that if there are wine and girls in heaven
So must also be Duke Ellington.
And I for one shall pass by heaven if he is not there.
I have eaten berries touched by poisoned lips
And I have drunk the spider with the wine
And am become excessively sophisticated.
The drowning figures in the strawberry beds
That balance on the fingers of my eyes
Know strange marsupial pleasures for their pains.
Pit-pat go the tremors of my heart
When feline tom toes scrape-the grape bloom of the grass.
Yes, and when I hear Duke Ellington
It is like being at the top of the highest skyscraper
Giving a television interview on
"Why it is my duty to jump".
I jump because I feel like jumping and as I rocket earthwards
I do assure you that my soul is soaring with the angels
And being immortal it is singing 'Paducah'.
With what a zest he hit the pavement they will say.
There's death-wish for you.

But these are words to make one weep.
Words to make one pull the blinds on death,
Its uttermost poignancy, other lives are not the same.

For records wear, the masters are destroyed,
And I grow old and only foolish tears then flow.

So to the strange castle on the mist-enshrouded hill
Take this path overgrown with the scentless primrose,
Deliberately crush its pallid petals,
At the top you will find, the doors swing open,
And invisible hands to lead you.
Please follow the invisible hands. This is a dream.
The doors, twice as high as you, swing open.
Black and white checkerboard tiles lead onwards
Where the eye beckons to a silk-hung couch.
Is it 'La Belle au Bois Dormante'?
No, it is find the lady and whoever has been here before you.

The whole contraption falls apart.
Sick with despair at the eternal cheating
You might as well enter into the spirit of the thing.
Anyway I may not speak to you, face.
Face, the instant-return crease of your smile is driving me crazy.
Face, I cannot stand this much longer.
That is why I have put you in the suicide category.
That is why the music playing, making the black horses curvet,
The white horses delicately paw the air, as they bear away
The glass casket in which you beat the sides to say you're live.
Shall in the morning, turn the horse to mice,
The casket to a meloncauliflower. Then, farewell face.

I am sailing away in the cold winter morning. On the prow of my ship a record endlessly turns.
Do you hear its sound in the cold damp air?
The name of the tune is "Jolly Wog"
And these vibrations supply all the necessary power
To transport me to Avalon,
There to heal me of my dolorous wound.

Three queans greet me on the farthest bank as lightly I step ashore
Who are also fans of the Duke.
This, they whisper, in these grey fields,
Is heaven. Behind that thorn-bush you will find the girls,
A portable drinks stand and barbecue.
But what, say I, of Ellington?
Hundreds of 78s they gladly chime
And I run over the watery grass
And am still running, it is so far, and farther still,
Perpetually running. The music vanishes.

1965

EN L'AN TRENTIESME

Sarah Bernhardt,
Mistinguette,
Minnie Maddern Fiske,

Contract my bladder.

Moths are ebonised.
The wind wrinkles.
Footprints in the concrete
Vanish.

She deals me four aces
With her fat blue hands.
When shall I die?
Tonight? She smiles.

You impale your sausage
On a plastic fork.
Miss Theda Bara
Disdains death in a balloon.

This intricate navel
Harbours curious debris.
When the mask peeled off
She should have had a face of some kind.

The undying patriarch
Makes notes to destroy
Romantic illusions.
Time passes.

A hiccough on the stairs
Betrays his fate.
Mirrors bring madness.
She has loose teeth.

Jaws crunch and eyes eat visions.
In the servants' quarters they are dancing obscenely.

The weather is unsettling.
The weather is unsettling.
We do find so.
Oh yes, undoubtedly.

She and I together
Sate and talked about the weather.
She said "You have nothing to fear,
It is your thirtieth year".